

SEM44. English Medium Instruction (EMI) as a catalyst for humane and equitable education... or not?

11 September h. 11:00-13:00, S5 Moro

Convenors

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Abstract

While English Medium Instruction (EMI) has become a dominant strategy in higher education globally, there are critical concerns about linguistic equity, implementation policies, teacher professional development and effective language learning (Dearden, 2014; Galloway & Rose, 2021). Often seen as a globalization tool, can EMI be reimagined as a catalyst for promoting linguistic equity, sustainable global dialogue and more positive attitudes towards English and multilingualism (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009)? This seminar aims to explore EMI's potential to embody human and humane values from a critical perspective. EMI can bridge linguistic and cultural divides, promoting empathy and collaboration. Its implementation may also, however, highlight inequality, privileging those with access to English proficiency while marginalizing others. Indeed, a greater emphasis on student translanguaging and multilingual practices may be beneficial (Dalziel, 2021; Zheng & Qui, 2024). We invite scholars to present contributions to highlight these areas in relation to EMI: the question of equality, multilingualism and multiculturalism, as well as practical issues of internationalization and lecturer professional development.

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SEM44. Papers

11 September h. 11:00-13:00, S5 Moro

- *Framing EMI in higher education policy: Multilingual representations and stakeholder visions in strategic plans* (Nesrine Triki, Università di Torino)
- *Equal partners? English and Indigenous languages in a trilingual university* (Graham Burton, Libera Università di Bolzano)
- *Ensuring quality in EMI: Addressing the needs of medical lecturers* (Elena Borsetto, Università di Verona)
- *Bridging ESP, EAP, and EMI to foster researcher autonomy and professional development in the medical field* (Carlotta Fiammenghi, Università di Verona)
- *Affective factors and epistemic diversity in EMI assessment* (Katherine Ackerley, Università degli Studi di Padova / Fiona Dalziel, Università degli Studi di Padova)

SEM44. Abstracts

Affective factors and epistemic diversity in EMI assessment

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This paper explores the role of affective factors in EMI assessment in Italy, examining the interplay between language use and engagement with local examination systems, including oral assessment. As Serna-Bermejo and Lasagabaster (2025: 185) remind us, “Affective factors such as beliefs cannot be separated from students’ behaviours”. In this regard, Thompson et al. (2025) call for research into the interrelation between affective factors and L2 proficiency in EMI learning outcomes, concluding that students may need more support “related to the language *and* content domains” (Thompson et al. 2025: 113). We investigate how these two domains come together in evaluation procedures and impact on affective factors.

Bowles (2017: 197) observes a “local epistemology” in Italian university exams, made up of “examiners’ expectations of how the oral exam should proceed and how students should construct and express their knowledge”. Not only may international students be unfamiliar with such procedures, but the lecturers may also be “unaware of international students’ expectations regarding assessment practices” (Mair 2021: 111). As Zheng and Qui (2024: 98) argue in their investigation of epistemic (in)justice, “due respect needs to be paid to the epistemic diversity as well as intellectual traditions carried by these teachers and students”. Although their study focuses on language use, evaluation traditions might also negatively affect the success of EMI students from different cultural and academic backgrounds.

We thus administered a survey to students from a range of disciplines, to address the following RQs:

1. How may affective factors concerning EMI evaluation be related to assessment procedures as well as language proficiency?
2. What could be the relationship between these affective factors and possible epistemic (in)justice in EMI assessment?

We conclude by reflecting that EMI does not imply abandoning local academic traditions, but practitioners should encourage students to develop strategies to deal with evaluation procedures while raising lecturers’ awareness of the implications for epistemic (in)justice. Examinations should, therefore, represent inclusive, collaborative dialogue (Serna-Bermejo & Lasagabaster 2025) in which culturally-diverse hermeneutical resources (Zheng & Qui 2024) are recognised and valued.

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Ensuring quality in EMI: Addressing the needs of medical lecturers

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The expansion of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in medical education raises questions about linguistic equity and access to high-quality teaching in internationalised academic contexts (Lasagabaster, 2022). While EMI offers increased global visibility and exchange, it also introduces significant challenges for lecturers who must teach complex content in a

non-native language, frequently without adequate institutional support (Galloway & Rose, 2021). This presentation explores the linguistic and professional challenges that medical faculty members face in EMI settings, drawing on the results of a needs analysis questionnaire administered to lecturers in a medical degree programme.

Findings from the questionnaire reveal specific areas where lecturers feel underprepared, including spontaneous classroom interaction, conference communication, and the use of clear, intelligible English when explaining specialised content. In response to these findings, a 15-hour training programme was developed to offer practical and reflective support in oral communication, effective lecturing techniques, pronunciation, and student engagement strategies. This initiative not only addresses the immediate needs of EMI lecturers but also contributes to long-term educational quality and institutional fairness (Valcke et al., 2022). By offering targeted language and teaching support, the project fosters a more equitable EMI environment—one in which both staff and students can thrive. Beyond the initial training, the project aspires to establish a continuous support service offering EMI lecturers access to tailored language resources and ongoing professional development

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Equal partners? English and Indigenous languages in a trilingual university

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The increase in the use of English within higher education, most obviously in the form of English Medium Instruction (EMI), puts English in contact – and potentially also in competition – with local languages in many institutions around the world. In the words of Lasagabaster (2021, p. 83), the teaching of English “is a heavily loaded endeavour that usually raises feelings of linguistic imposition, identity loss, and cultural occupation.”

This paper reports on how English interacts with two indigenous languages in a somewhat unique sociolinguistic context: the trilingual Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (unibz), which offers teaching in three languages, English, German (a majority language locally, but a minority language nationally) and Italian (the national language). Unlike many other contexts where EMI is employed, English has never been ‘added’ as a teaching language, but has been present as an official teaching language at unibz since its foundation.

Building on two recent studies on the role of English and the sociolinguistic situation at unibz (Burton & Gatti, 2024a; 2024b), this paper presents an analysis of a large quantitative dataset – specifically, responses to a survey administered to students, academic staff and administrative staff (total responses: 1,538, response rate: 31%, completion rate: 93%). It explores how the language policies at unibz, which place English as one of three equal linguistic partners, rather than treating it as a special case, help to create balance between the three languages in what is a complex sociolinguistic environment. Furthermore, it explores how attitudes to English at unibz nonetheless vary, both according to the nature of the attitude measured (the paper will report on four separate constructs relating to the presence of English at unibz), and also to demographic variables, specifically: age, role at the university (student / academic staff / administrative staff) and faculty. While the overall picture to emerge is positive, it is nonetheless nuanced, showing how different stakeholders react to the presence of English in different, sometimes surprising ways.

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Bridging ESP, EAP, and EMI to foster researcher autonomy and professional development in the medical field

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In the context of increasing internationalization and the expansion of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education, supporting non-native English-speaking academics in the production of research articles has become crucial, because it not only enhances publication outcomes but also contributes to linguistic equity and language training (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Wingate & Hakim, 2022; Dearden & Beaumont 2024). This paper proposes a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to academic writing and language teaching, aimed at fostering continuous learning and sustainable professional development for academic researchers and teachers in the medical field (Huang, Lin & Tsou, 2024).

The project follows a multi-phase approach, including the present study and an EMI course tailored to meet the needs of the Department of Medicine at the University of Verona. In our study, first, medical researchers voluntarily provide drafts of their research papers, which are then analysed by researchers from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. The *Markin* software is used (Version 4.3.1.1) to annotate errors, signalling error type without providing overt correction; instances of good language use are also highlighted to stimulate reflection and discussion. Follow-up meetings are held to collaboratively identify corrections or alternative formulations, encouraging active engagement with language issues and genre conventions. The methodology is designed to promote researchers' critical language awareness, enhance their ability to self-edit, and gradually increase their confidence and competence in academic English writing. Furthermore, the approach fosters a dialogic learning environment where linguistic support is tailored to disciplinary conventions and the researchers' individual needs. The transfer of skills from research to teaching in English is possible in all of these areas.

This collaborative model thus attempts to build a bridge between English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and EMI. By empowering researchers to engage more effectively with the linguistic demands of global academic communication, it aims to support a more equitable and humane practice of EAP and EMI; the findings will also hopefully contribute to ongoing discussions about multilingualism, professional development, and sustainable internationalization in higher education.

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Framing EMI in higher education policy: Multilingual representations and stakeholder visions in strategic plans

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Although English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Europe often traces its origins to the Bologna Process and the subsequent national internationalisation policies, its evolving nature is deeply enshrined in locally 'intentional' (de Wit et al., 2015) institutional strategies, specifically as expressed in university strategic plan (SP) documents. This study seeks to explain how EMI is strategically planned within Italian universities by focusing on how decision makers directly and indirectly pave the ground for its creation and implementation across the various sections of the SPs and how they conceptualise EMI in relation to the diverse stakeholders. The study takes a discourse perspective which considers SP as a genre of organizational planning and communication (Bhatia, 2004; Cornut et al., 2012) whose macro-level external features lie at the interface between managerial and policy genres and whose micro-level internal features interact with the corporate, academic and educational fields. Such an approach positions EMI policies and implementations within a discourse genre that reflects and enacts meanings, beliefs and policies construed at the micro and macro situational and cultural contexts, which in turn, shape the lexico-grammatical and discursive choices. 16 university SPs written in Italian and their English

equivalent versions have been collected from their respective universities' official websites. A first phase in the analysis focuses on the lexical realisation of EMI. Using Sketch Engine, the texts will be searched for the key lemmas referencing EMI (e.g., Courses taught in a foreign language, Degree Programmes (taught) in English, internationalisation of teaching). This phase shall provide a quantitative description of the preferred lexical choices adopted to explicitly or implicitly construct the themes around EMI across universities and across languages. In a second phase, a random sample of these lexical items will be selected from the English SPs and will be analysed in their situational contexts to explain the textual (information structure), interpersonal (mood and modality) and experiential (clause type and participant roles) meanings and functions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) associated with the human actors involved in EMI. The analysis of these metafunctions will help uncover how EMI is constructed not just as a policy object, but as a socially and ideologically meaningful practice (Pieczka, 2018; Adriansen et al., 2023). The study will, thus, shed light on the extent to which inward (texts in the local language) and outward (texts in English) orientations of SPs may shape the lexical and grammatical choices used and will contribute to our understanding of how EMI is perceived and valued within institutional discourse.

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